

The Post and Courier

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Charleston, SC 29403

**PUBLIC SERVICE
COMMISSION OF
SOUTH CAROLINA**

**DOCKETING
DEPARTMENT
NOTICE OF FILING
AND HEARING**

DOCKET NO. 1997-239-C

The Public Service Commission of South Carolina (the "Commission") received a letter from the South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS) wherein the ORS seeks authorization to utilize Universal Service Fund (USF) monies to increase awareness of the State's Lifeline and Link-up programs and to qualify households in the BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. (BellSouth) territory that are 125% of poverty level and are eligible to receive benefits of these services.

According to ORS' letter, the Commission's Order No. 2001-996 states, "The Commission shall take the necessary steps to maximize the benefit of the FCC's federal Lifeline program for qualified telecommunications customers in the State of South Carolina." (p. 10 of the Guidelines). Moreover, the ORS would like to assist BellSouth in extending this program to those households in the BellSouth territory that are at or below 125% of poverty. Pursuant to a settlement agreement filed May 19, 2004, in the Court of Common Pleas between the Consumer Advocate and BellSouth ("125% Agreement"), BellSouth may provide Lifeline credits to qualifying BellSouth subscribers who are not currently receiving such credits. As per the 125% Agreement, if a designated South Carolina state agency confirms to BellSouth those applicants who are end user customers and are at or below 125% of the federal poverty level, those applicants will receive Lifeline credits against their telephone bills. Currently, only customers who are at or below 100% of the poverty level receive such credits.

ORS also asserts that BellSouth has proposed that the ORS be designated as the agency to administer the program that provides credits to additional qualifying customers. The ORS has agreed to assume the responsibilities of administering this program upon the contingency that the Commission allows funds to be allocated to the USF administrative expense component.

In order to qualify and educate participants in the Lifeline program, ORS will take a two-pronged approach. First, in order to capture those citi-

zens who are not currently receiving Lifeline benefits but are entitled to such, the ORS will implement an outreach campaign. Annual funding will be needed for a full time employee position in order to administer this part of the program. Second, while most participants are deemed eligible based on their participation in AFDC, Medicaid, or other benefit programs, those in the BellSouth 125% agreement would need to be qualified separately. To do this, ORS asserts that it would need the support of an additional staff member skilled in dealing with low income applicants and monies for other start-up costs, such as computer time, marketing, and training associated with the Lifeline program. The ORS requests these additional funds from the USF.

A copy of the ORS' letter is on file in the offices of the Public Service Commission of South Carolina, 101 Executive Center Drive, Columbia, South Carolina 29210 and is available on the Commission's website at www.psc.state.sc.us.

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE a hearing on the above matter has been scheduled to begin at **10:30 a.m., on Wednesday, April 20, 2005**, before the Commission in the Commission's Hearing Room at 101 Executive Center Drive, Saluda Building, Columbia, South Carolina 29210.

Any person who wishes to participate in this matter, as a party of record with the right of cross-examination should file a Petition to Intervene in accordance with the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, on or before **February 28, 2005** and indicate the amount of time required for his presentation. Please refer to Docket No. 1997-239-C.

Any person who wishes to testify and present evidence at the hearing should notify the Docketing Department in writing at the address below, on or before **February 28, 2005**, and indicate the amount of time required for his presentation. Please refer to Docket No. 1997-239-C.

Any person who wishes to be notified of any change in the hearing date, but does not wish to present testimony or be a party of record, may do so by notifying the Docketing Department in writing at the address below on or before **February 28, 2005**. Please refer to Docket No. 1997-239-C.

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE: Any person who wishes to have his or her comments considered as part of the official record of

this proceeding **MUST** present such comments, in person, to the Commission during the hearing.

Persons seeking information about the Commission's Procedures should contact the Commission by dialing (803) 896-5110.

Public Service Commission
of South Carolina
Attn: Docketing Department
Post Office Drawer 11649
Columbia, SC 29211